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The LITTLE JOKER



By SAM SMILEY

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THE LITTLE JOKER;

OR,

ALWAYS READY FOR FUN.

By SAM SMILEY.

Author of "The Trials of a Street Band," "Joining the Jolly Owls," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LITTLE JOKER.

JOE MILLER was small, wiry and tough for a boy of seventeen. He was the only son of a widow, and her main support. His father had died when he was but eight years old, when he had to sell papers and black boots to help his mother ward off famine and the landlord.

He had learned to read a little before his father died, and when he took to selling papers he read every paper as soon as it came out. By that means he acquired a knowledge of men and things that equaled the acquirements of some men who stood high in business, political or social circles.

But he was a gamin in the fullest sense of the word, and had a gamin's repugnance to policemen, and as he grew older his feeling of dislike toward them increased, because he looked upon them as the natural enemies of New York boys.

When Joe reached his sixteenth birthday his mother suggested to him the advisability of seeking some business connection which would take him out of the street.

"You can't always stay in the street, Joe," she said to him. "When you are a grown up man you won't want to black boots and sell papers. The boys would hoot at you and make life unpleasant for you."

Joe laughed, and said:

"It would taker mighty lively old cyclone ter make it unpleasant for Joseph."

"Well, you can't make your way up in the world as a bootblack, you know," replied his mother.

"I can't, eh! Why I know two bootblacks who got up in the world—way up on the Island for six months. Pshaw!"

"Joseph, you must stop your way of joking," said his mother. "You are getting old enough to go into some kind of business. You must look around and try to get a position where you can have a chance to rise in the world."

"Yes, ma'am," returned Joe, with a quiet resignation that caused her to look around at him.

"What do you want to be when you grow up to be a man?" she asked.

"I want to be a rich old duffer with a red nose and a bald head."

"Oh, mercy! Go 'long out of my sight, you naughty boy!" and she laughed till she cried when her hopeful son had gone off.

"Joe is a good boy to me," she said. "He never neglects me, but gives me all he makes. I am a heavy load on him, I know, but he is as happy as the days are long. How could I live without him?"

Joe took his mother's request to heart, and began to look around to find something to do that would open a way for him to make a rise in the world.

"Hello, Joe!" cried a newsboy, as he was walking along and struck against him, "where's der fun'ral?"

"All round us, Jimmy," was the prompt reply.

"Whatch yer givin' me, Joe?"

"Facts, Jimmy."

"Oh, come off, or spit out the facts," and the newsboy stood listening for the 'facts' over which Joe had been looking so solemn and glum.

"Didn't yer know the world is er coming to an end, Jimmy?" Joe asked, with a solemn air about him that would have made a stoic laugh.

Jimmy looked hard at him for a moment or two, and then fell down in a heap at his feet.

"Gimme a good tombstone, Joe," he gasped, as if overcome, "but no croaking, mind."

Joe looked down at him with a solemn expression of countenance, and asked:

"Do yer want to be put on ice?"

That was enough.

Jimmy sprang to his feet, and fled as if in mortal terror. An elderly gentleman on a corner near by waiting for a car, saw the little by-play of the youthful wags and became deeply interested, though he had not heard a word of what had passed between them.

"What ails that boy?" he asked of Joe.

"What boy?"

"That boy who fell down near you just now, and then sprang up and ran away."

"Oh, him! He's a 'high-up,' he is."

"What's a 'high-up'?" the old gentleman asked.

"Why, don't you know what a 'high-up' is?"

"No, I do not."

"Well, a 'high-up' is a duffer who don't go round asking people questions about other people."

The old gentleman glared at him through his gold-rimmed glasses, and seemed to be making a mental effort to size himself up.

The reply of the youth had cut him down so small in his own estimation that he found the calculation a very difficult one.

But he was so mad that he would have given five dollars for the privilege of giving the boy a trouncing on the spot.

"I say, youngster!" he called out as Joe was moving away; "how long have you been out of the House of Correction?"

"Ever since the day after you were sent up the river," returned Joe, quick as a flash.

The old gentleman almost choked with rage.

"You are impudent!" he exclaimed.

"Am I?"

"Yes—the most impudent young imp I ever saw. 'I'd like to

give you a good trouncing!" and he grew red in the face as he spoke.

"Look out now," said Joe, cheerily, "or you'll burst your liver. I've known old duffers to swell up and burst like bladders."

The old gentleman was in such a rage that he was on the point of rushing at him and using his cane on him, when he was startled by a roaring noise behind him.

He wheeled, and saw a maddened team of truck horses dashing toward him at full speed.

He was so paralyzed with fear that he was unable to move an inch to save his life. The thought flashed through his mind that his time had come, and that in ten seconds more he would be mangled and crushed to death.

Just then Joe Miller sprang forward with a yell that would have made a Comanche Indian shrivel up with envy, and flung his cap at the head of the horse nearest to him. The cap landed on the horse's eye just as Joe yelled, and both caused the team to shy to the right, thus passing the imperiled old gentleman about two feet.

He staggered back and would have fallen to the ground had not a man caught him.

"Are you hurt, sir?" the man asked as he supported him.

"No," he feebly replied. "It was a narrow escape."

"It was, indeed, sir. That lad saved your life."

"Yes—where is he?"

A great crowd had gathered, and Joe lost his cap.

Somebody had heard the old gentleman ask for him, and collared Joe, saying:

"The gentleman wants to see you," and in another minute he had Joe before him.

"You saved my life," the old man said, extending his hand toward him.

"Did I?"

"Yes. I would have been killed but for you."

"Well, let it be a warning to you not to sass a boy again. Be a good boy and go to Sunday school. Don't go in swimming on Sunday and you'll be an angel some day if——"

The rest of his remarks were drowned in the roar that followed from the bystanders. Even the old gentleman roared. They all saw the point—which was but the anticipation of the good advice which the youth expected would be given him.

"What's this crowd blocking up the street for!" a burly policeman asked. "Move on! Move on now!" and he began prodding the people with his club in a brutal manner.

The crowd scattered, of course, and the old gentleman was reached by the officer.

"Are you hurt, sir?" the officer asked.

"No, only overcome by being so near death by a runaway team."

"Shall I call a carriage, sir?"

"Yes, if you please."

He turned and beckoned to a hack-driver, who promptly drove up with his carriage.

Looking around for Joe, the old gentleman saw him with a crowd of newsboys across the street.

"Call that bare-headed boy over here," he said. "He saved my life and lost his cap, and I want to thank him."

The officer looked over that way and saw who he was.

"That's the worst mischief-maker on the street," he said.

"That may be, but he saved my life. I want to speak to him."

The officer called to Joe to come over, and he ran across the street.

"Here's something with which to buy you another hat," said the old gentleman, handing Joe a ten-dollar bill, "and when you want a friend come to No. — Madison avenue and ask for me. My name is Durand."

"He'll bother you enough, sir," said the officer, who remembered Joe as one of the liveliest newsboys and bootblacks on the street.

"Oh, cheese, cop," said Joe. "You're only mad because you didn't catch on yourself. Here, I found a whistle which belongs to some of you cops. I don't want it, because it's against the law for me to use it. You may have it. Maybe you may know the cop as lost it," and he drew from his pocket a splendid nickel-plated police whistle and handed it to the officer, who took it quickly, saying:

"I guess you priggled it somewhere, you young rascal."

"Nixey prig," Joe replied, as he turned away. "Maybe it's no good."

The officer put it to his lips to test it, and when he blew in it his face was covered with fine white flour.

"Whoop!" yelled Joe, and the enraged officer dashed after him with full speed.

Joe took to his heels and ran like the wind. The officer was no match for him in a foot race, but he was in such a rage that he was determined to run him down and catch him at all hazards.

Half a hundred newsboys and bootblacks ran along with him, hooting at him till he was like a mad bull with a thousand hornets after him.

Joe well knew the policeman could not catch him, and so he had no fears of him. He dodged around and called out to him:

"Say, cop, go wash your face and I'll wait for you!"

"I'll club the head off of you!" hissed the enraged officer, making a desperate effort to catch him.

"Oh, you can't catch for a cent," retorted Joe, as he dodged about like a cricket, till several hundred people stopped to see the fun.

The white flour on the officer's face caused roars of laughter at his expense, which added to his wrath each moment. But he was too stout and clumsy to do much running, and in a little while he had to give it up and go into a barber's shop to wash his face and brush the flour off his clothes.

CHAPTER II.

JOE'S LITTLE PINCH OF SNUFF.

WHEN the officer ceased pursuit, Joe strolled leisurely away toward his home, stopping on the way to buy himself a hat. He knew that the cop would never forgive him for putting the laugh on him the way he did, and that he would have to be on his guard for several days to avoid being snapped by some other blue coat.

"That cop was too fresh," he said to himself, as he made his way homeward. "He can't take a joke when it's on *him*. But he's always ready to put one on somebody else."

The cop swore by his uniform that he would catch the little joker and shake a few jokes out of him for the trick he had played him.

Joe went home and gave nine dollars to his mother, telling her how he had earned it.

She was overjoyed at his good fortune, and said:

"It's a windfall, Joe. We have not had so much money in the house since your father died. You must go to the gentleman's residence and ask him to help you get a situation somewhere."

"Yes, ma'am," he said.

Before Joe left the house, Jimmie O'Brien came running into the room where he was, saying:

"Say, cully, der cop's at der door!"

Joe sprang out of the room and ran to the stairs, up which he ran to the roof, and made his way over a half dozen houses till he struck the one Jimmie lived in.

Jimmie was so much in the habit of going out on the roof, that the scuttle was open nearly all the time.

Joe quickly passed down the stairs to the street, and went off to a point opposite the entrance to the tenement in which his mother lived.

There he stood and watched the officer searching the three little rooms up-stairs, and saw his mother's pale face as she looked on.

Disappointed at not finding him at home, the officer went down-stairs and stood at the door, looking up and down the street in quest of the boy.

"Say, cop!" called Joe, "you've washed yer face, haven't you?"

The officer looked surprised at seeing him there.

"Are you there, Joe?" he demanded.

"Yer can bet yer club I am, cop," he replied. "How's biz any-how?"

"Come over and shake hands. Joe," the cop called.

"Whew! What a gall yer have!" exclaimed Joe, laughing heartily. The officer started over and Joe started down the street.

As it was no use to chase him there was no race, and in a little while the officer gave it up as a bad job.

Now that he knew the officer wanted to club him, Joe was more than ever on the alert. But he could no more resist the temptation to have his fun than a bird could refuse to fly.

Round in the next block he found an old rum-soaked bum lying asleep on a broken truck.

An officer was just going to lam the soles of his well-ventilated shoes when Joe spoke up and said:

"Hold on, cop, let me wake him up. I can make him lively as er kitten."

"How will you do it? He is dead drunk."

"Just watch me," and he ran into a grocery and bought a penny's worth of ground pepper, with which he returned to the truck.

He sprinkled the pepper on the tramp's upper lip and nose, and as he breathed quite a quantity was taken into his sniffer.

Joe leapt down off the truck and ran over across the street to watch developments.

He did not have to wait long.

The tramp gave a sneeze which nearly shook the truck to pieces.

Another followed, which came near shaking the rags off himself, and then he woke up and tried to look about to see where he was.

But the sneezes came in such rapid succession that he could not look anywhere.

He sneezed and sneezed, a succession of explosions attracting the attention of everybody on the block.

Joe and a crowd of boys stood on the other side of the street and laughed, whilst the officer looked on and mentally resolved to go armed with some of that snuff ever after.

The tramp doubled up, and straightened out, and doubled up again, rolled out of the truck to the ground, got up on his feet, gave another sneeze that knocked him down as well as John L. Sullivan could have done it.

"Just catch on to that now!" cried Joe, as the tramp went down. "What's the use of clubbing 'em when yer can make 'em club their own heads off!"

"I say, youngster," said the officer, turning to Joe, whilst laughing immoderately, "what kind of snuff is that?"

"It's called 'knock-em-out-sneezer,'" replied Joe.

"Let me see some of it."

Joe opened the little bit of brown paper in which he had about a half a teaspoonful and held it up to the officer's nose.

Just a little bit got inside the official sniffer, and a sneeze like an explosion came.

"Blast your (kl-chew!) hide!" gasped the officer, making a dash for the little joker.

But Joe hastened to make himself scarce, as he well knew that the cop could outrun him. The sneezes gave him a chance to get away, and then the officer went to work to club the tramp who had sneezed himself almost to death.

He took him by the collar and dragged him along toward the station-house, both sneezing like all possessed.

A couple of hundred boys and girls followed them, screaming with laughter all the way.

At the station-house the sergeant was unable to get anything like an intelligent statement out of the officer.

"What's this man been doing?" he asked of the officer.

"Drunk and (ke-chew!) dis—or (ke-chew!) derly, sir (ke-chew!)"

"What's the matter with both of you?" demanded the sergeant, as both of them nearly raised the roof with their sneezes.

The tramp didn't know and the officer would not tell. It was a joke he would not give away for a month's pay. Not he.

But as he had not taken as big a dose as the tramp had he managed to get over it after awhile, and then said:

"I found this tramp drunk and lying on the ground trying to sneeze his head off. I arrested him, and then I got to sneezing, too," and he gave one more sneeze to prove that what he had said was true.

The tramp was locked up, and for an hour after he was heard groaning and sneezing in his cell.

The officer would not give the secret away, but he swore by his trusty club to get even with that little joker if it took till a day after Christmas.

Joe laughed till he was drawn double over the tremendous sneezes the officer let out on the way to the station.

"Oh, no," he chuckled, "I guess not! It's move on now. 'Get out of that,' or be 'Off with you now or I'll run you in.' all the time. I guess I ain't left much. Oh, no!" and he chuckled again, as if the thing could not be kept down, try hard as he would.

When he went home in the evening and entered the street door of

the tenement house he was grabbed by a strong hand in the dark, and a gruff voice called out:

"I've got you, eh? Play me for a sucker, eh? Fill my face full of flour, eh?" and the officer was getting him in shape to club him, when Joe, seeing that he was fairly caught, and that he would get a taste of the club, wriggled out of the coat and left it in his hands.

"Well, blast my eyes!" gasped the dumfounded cop as he held up the empty garment. "The young imp is an eel! Here, take your coat. I'll get you yet, or my name is not Gilhooly," and he tossed the coat out into the street and walked down the street toward the corner.

"Look here, now, cop," called Joe when he had picked up his coat and put it on, "I want to make up for that little joke. I ain't got nothing against yer. Why don't yer pass the joke around and let up on me for giving it to yer?"

The officer laughed and said:

"Blast you, what did you give it to me for in such a public place?"

"That's where the good laugh came in, you know."

"Well, it's all right. I'll keep the whistle, but you want to keep out of my way."

"Oh, I won't get on yer corns, yer can bet yer life," and Joe turned away and went home.

"Joe Miller," cried his mother the moment he entered the rooms they occupied, "what are the police after you for? What have you been doing, anyhow?"

"I ain't done nothing wrong, mother," he replied. "I played a joke on him, and when everybody laughed at him he wanted to club my head off. I have made up with him now."

She gave him a lecture about playing pranks, and said:

"You'll get yourself into trouble if you don't stop it. I was afraid it was about that money you brought home and gave to me."

"No, mother, that money was honestly won. Don't worry about me," and he went to the table and ate heartily of the plain, wholesome food she had prepared for him.

CHAPTER III.

A SUSPICION OF FOUL PLAY.

Joe remained in the house the rest of the evening, as he was apprehensive that the cop whom he had peppered would upset him when he least expected him.

But the next morning he was up and out early, ready for anything that would turn up in the way of business or fun.

The first acquaintance he met was Jimmy O'Brien, and together they wandered down toward the City Hall, which had long been their stamping ground.

On the way down they overtook a couple of Chinamen, who were sauntering along in the garb peculiar to their country.

"Hello, washee-washee!" cried Jimmy. "No tickee, no shirtee!"

"Oh, let the pig-tails alone, Jimmy!" exclaimed Joe. "They are good fellows in their way. I like 'em."

Jimmy tumbled to a wink from Joe, and began to abuse the Celestials in a real old Tipperary style, and Joe as warmly defended them.

The Chinamen heard every word that passed between them, but did not say anything themselves.

Their experience in this free country had told them that they could pick up a free fight any day in the year by resenting anything said or done by the "Melican bloys."

"I say a Chinaman is as good as you are!" said Joe, hotly, whereat Jimmy went for him, and they both rolled on the ground right in front of the two Celestials.

To the intense surprise of both Joe and Jimmy, the two Chinamen seized the latter by the heels and ran half a block with him, dragging him as boys drag their sleds behind them.

Joe roared with laughter and Jimmy yelled. A dozen boys caught sight of them and gave chase. The pig-tails dropped him and took to their heels, and a couple of policemen broke up the chase.

Jimmy pulled himself together and rejoined Joe, looking as full of doubt as was possible for one of his age to be.

"Look hyer, cully," he said to Joe, "was yer joke on me or the pig-tails?"

"Well, we played for them, Jimmy," he replied, "but the heathens didn't get left, did they?"

"No; I'm the kid as got left," replied Jimmy, looking as if he want-

ed satisfaction out of somebody. "They made a mop outen me an' wiped up the hull street."

"So they did. 'Twixt you an' me, Jimmy, they don't get left very far behind."

"Dat's er fact, cully. But if you put up anoder job like dat on me I'll get hunk wid you, an' don't yer forgit it!"

And Jimmy looked as though he was half inclined to jump on him then and there."

"Look here, Jimmy," said Joe, "I was going to work a snap on them pig-tails, but they were too smart for us. Don't yer say nothing an' I'll be as dumb as er clam about it."

"Oh, that's all right, Joe," and Jimmy appeared to be satisfied, though he was half inclined to think that Joe had put up a job on him.

They walked over toward Broadway, and were soon on that great thoroughfare going down toward the City Hall.

In front of a window of an art store a very dignified old gentleman was admiring the pictures displayed to public view.

His hands were crossed behind his back whilst the thumb and index finger of his right hand held a lighted cigar from which the light blue smoke curled gracefully skyward.

A small boy of the guttersnipe species was standing up to the cigar, gently touching it with his lips and drawing the aromatic smoke like an old veteran and blowing from his nose.

"Oh, look at that now!" exclaimed Joe in a half whisper. "What a snap the kid has dropped on to! A real Havana, too. Just whiff the perfume!" and he straightened himself up and sniffed the air like a coon dog in search of the trail.

Jimmy was fond of a cigar, and as he looked at the youngster enjoying the free graft his mouth watered for a taste of it too.

Joe took a penny from his pocket and gave it to the kid, motioning to Jimmy to take his place at the fragrant Havana.

Jimmy quickly moved into position, and just as his lips touched the cigar the man moved, and he felt the cigar touch the youth.

Wheeling around quickly he gave Jimmy a kick that landed him in the gutter ten feet away.

"What do you mean, you young rascal?" the irate citizen demanded.

Jimmy did not volunteer any explanations.

He was too busy trying to pull himself together and see if all the pieces were there to answer any questions.

As for Joe, he went to his assistance and helped to put him on his feet again.

"Ain't hurt, eh?" he asked Jimmy.

"I'm kilt," replied Jimmy. "But when I come to life again I'll get hunk with you, Joe Miller."

"Why, what's I done, Jimmy," Joe asked in innocent surprise.

"Oh, you ain't done nothing, you ain't," sneered Jimmy. "You didn't put them heathen Chinees onto me—oh, no, an' yer didn't put up this racket—oh, no. You didn't do nothing of the sort."

"Why bless your two eyes, Jimmy, you are way off your base. You can never make a run home on that line. I didn't have anything to do with that racket, and you know it."

"Oh, come off, Joe. What do you take me for?"

"Oh, go soak your head," returned Joe. "The lamp-post had as much to do with it as I did."

"How is it that I get left every time, old man?" Jimmy asked.

"It's your luck, Jimmy."

"Luck be blowed! I never catch on ter that kind er luck till I get wid you."

They went on down the street, and were within a couple of blocks of the City Hall Square when an officer dashed out of a doorway upon them.

It was the cop who had caught on to the pepper-snuff the day before.

Joe caught a glimpse of him just in time to spring aside and escape the club.

Then it was a race between them and Jimmy followed to see how it would end.

Joe knew that the cop was a runner. He did not look back, but made a bee line for the North river as fast as his nimble feet could carry him.

The officer, satisfied that he could catch him, kept on in hot pursuit and was gaining on him when they struck a blockade of trucks on West Broadway.

Joe did not stop for the blockade but dodged under the horses' bellies and got across and halfway down the next block ere his pursuer could make the passage.

On striking the river front Joe ran along West street till he struck the Chambers street ferry, into which he dashed and sprang on board a ferryboat which was just pulling out from the slip.

The determined officer dashed after him, made a flying leap and landed on the boat and rolled over and over on the floor to the astonishment and amusement of the passengers.

By the time he had picked himself up and regained his club the boat was at least one hundred yards out in the stream.

He saw Joe looking at him with a sarcastic smile on his face, and made a dash at him.

Joe made a leap into the water, and a cry of horror went up from the passengers, they thinking he would drown.

The pilot signaled for the engineer to reverse, and he did so.

Joe sung out to the pilot:

"Go on with your old boat. I am going to have a swim!"

The pilot laughed and signaled the engineer to go on.

Then Joe put his thumb to his nose and waved a good-bye to the cop, who dared not take the leap, and cried out:

"Come on, old Sneezer! The water is fine. I'll swim you to Staten Island and back!"

But he dared not "come on" and was carried over to New Jersey, whilst Joe swam back to a pier, climbed out in the midst of half a hundred longshoremen, who cheered him to the top of their voices for the pluck he had displayed.

"What's the trouble, kid?" a grizzled old longshoreman asked.

"Oh, he wants to club me because I gave him a pinch of black pepper for snuff the other day, and nearly made him sneeze h's head off."

The longshoremen roared.

They appreciated the joke, and at once took a fancy to the little joker.

"Just let him come around for ye, lad," said one of them, "an' we won't wait for him to sneeze his head off—we'll knock it off for him."

"Yes—yes—so we will!" cried the gang in a chorus. "Just let the clubber show himself round this way. We'll pitch him into the river!"

"Oh, he has gone to Jersey," put in Joe, at which they all laughed and shook hands with him.

The crowd on the pier increased so rapidly that Joe had to hasten away for fear of being arrested for drawing the people to that point. So he thanked the rough but good-hearted longshoremen, and hastened to get away from the locality.

CHAPTER IV.

THE JOKE ON THE GROCER.

On leaving the pier Joe was joined by Jimmy O'Brien, who had come all the way down on the run to see how the chase would end.

"I didn't get left, did I, Jimmy?" Joe asked, as they walked off up toward Broadway again.

"Not much, cully," replied Jimmy, laughing heartily. "Yer only got wet. Der cop got left—way over in Jersey."

A crowd followed him because they saw that he had been in the water, and everybody wanted to know how it happened.

"I say, Jimmy," he said to his chum. "I'll get hauled in if I don't take a ride, sure."

"Yes, jump erboard an' make for up-town."

A street car was coming along bound for Central Park. Both of them boarded it and went up a half dozen blocks, where they got off and walked over to the street on which they lived.

There Joe ran up to his room and quickly changed his clothes for dry ones. His mother was out and did not know anything of what had happened until she came home in the afternoon.

By that time the policeman's trip to New Jersey was in the afternoon papers and half the city was laughing at him, though the readers were not informed of the officer's reasons for wanting to arrest the lad.

But Jimmy finally gave the snap away and officer Wilson heard sneezing on all sides, and loud guffaws wherever he went, and one of the papers declared that if he did club the little Joker he would deserve to have his club taken from him and dismissed the force.

The publication of the joke gave the boys all over the city the hint

of how to sober up the old bums when they were found dead drunk and asleep. A pinch of ground pepper never failed to make them sneeze a drunk into thin air, as well as afford infinite amusement to Young America.

That evening Joe was sent to the corner grocer's to make a little purchase for his mother. Whilst waiting to be served he noticed that the young clerk was trying to attend to a half dozen women at the same time.

One, a burly Irish woman bought, among other things, a box of axle grease for her husband, who was a truckman. Another purchased a box of table salt. Both boxes were of the same size and shape, and Joe could not resist the temptation to change the boxes when no one was looking.

Then he made his purchase and went home and gave it to his mother.

"Now for the fun," he said to himself as he hastened out of the house to find Jimmy.

Jimmy was not far away, and in a minute or two Joe had put him in possession of the little trick he had played on the grocer and his two customers.

"Holy Christopher!" exclaimed Jimmy. "Dat axle grease will be greased lightnin' when she finds it out. I know de gal, Josie."

"So do I. I haven't had any fun in a week, Jimmy," returned Joe. "Come on an' let's see the old gal make things lively."

They hastened back to the grocery and took a stand in front and awaited the arrival of the dames.

They did not wait many minutes ere the truckman's wife came sailing along, fire in her eye and the box of salt in her hand.

Dashing into the grocery like a mad steer, she startled everybody by crying out angrily:

"Misther O'Halloran, phat do ye mane by the loikes av this? Sure an' it's a dactint woman I am, an' av ye think——"

"What's the matter, Mrs. Malone?" the grocer asked, coming forward and looking at the box. "Isn't the salt all right?"

"Salt—salt, ye spalpeen!" she cried. "Sure an' is it salt ye sell for axle-grace? Be the powers, av me Mickey takes ye in hand salt won't save ye!"

Mr. O'Halloran was at a loss to understand the cause of her wrath, till Peter, the clerk, came up and remembered that he had sold her, among other things, a box of axle-grease.

But when he heard the row he knew that a mistake had been made, and so he spoke up:

"I guess it's my fault, mum. You wanted axle-grease—not salt!"

"Yis, ye spalpeen!" she replied. "Ye're too frish, y-z are. Take that an' salt yeself!" and with that she hurled the box of salt at Peter's head with all her might.

Peter dodged, of course, and the box went flying against the shelf on which bottles of sauces, syrups and pickles had been reposing peacefully for months.

A tremendous crash followed and about seven dollars damage was done, to say nothing of the excitement that resulted.

"Whoop!" yelled Mrs. Malone, now that her blood was up. "Sell me salt for wagin-grace, will ye? That for yer ould grocery," and she snapped her fingers at O'Halloran, who stood behind his counter with the quiet resignation of a martyr.

Just then the other woman came in exclaiming:

"Do you call that salt, Mr. O'Halloran?" and she dashed the box of axle grease on the counter. "Give me a box of good table salt or hand me money back!"

"Look at that now," cried Mrs. Malone. "Sure an' ye grazed her an' salted me, ye spalpeen!"

"Peter got them mixed, ma'am," said the grocer, giving each of them the goods they had called for. Mistakes will occur sometimes. There's no use in getting into a passion about it. You are both the best customers I have and I would not do anything to offend you for all the world. My wife remarked to me last Sunday, Mrs. Malone, that you were the best dressed lady at church that day, and——"

Mrs. Malone's red face beamed with smiles, and she remarked:

"Sure an' it's a fool I am ter be so angry about the salt, Mr. O'Halloran. It's meself as will pay ye the damage av yez say nothin' about it to me Mickey."

"Not for the world would I mention it, Mrs. Malone," said the grocer. "It's a fine old Irish spirit ye have. And I beg your pardon, Mrs.

Harris. Peter got 'em mixed, or the mistake would never have occurred. It shall never occur again, I assure you."

Both women went away mollified, and then the grocer changed entirely. He pitched into Peter and gave him a tongue lashing that came near curling him up.

"Boss," said Peter, "I didn't mix 'em. I gave her the axle grease. Somebody else mixed 'em, I'll swear to it."

"If it happens again I'll fire you out quicker'n lightning. Just look at that mess on the floor there."

"Make her pay for it, boss. She's got plenty of money in bank. Make her pay for it."

"Leave me alone for that," said O'Halloran, shaking his head in a determined manner. "I'll make her pay all it's worth."

Joe and Jimmy took in the circus for all it was worth, and then went in to ask Peter what the row was about.

"Oh, she got her back up because she paid for a box of axle-grease, and got a box of salt through mistake," replied Peter.

"Well, she's a screamer, an' no mistake," remarked Joe.

"Yes, a reg'lar hummer," put in Jimmy.

O'Halloran eyed Joe suspiciously.

He knew he was as full of mischief as an egg was of meat, and recollected that he was in the store at the time Mrs. Malone bought the axle-grease.

"Joe Miller," he said, coming from behind the counter and laying a hand on his shoulder, "what do you know about that racket?"

"What racket?" Joe asked.

"Why, the changing of those two boxes."

"I don't know anything except what Pete just told me," he replied.

"I half suspect that you put up that job, Joe."

"Honor bright, Mr. O'Halloran," said Joe, shaking his head.

"Well, I didn't see you do it, but I'd bet on it as quick as I would on anything else I didn't see. But if I catch you putting up any jobs on anybody in my store, I'll make you the head man in a funeral procession, and don't you forget it."

"I won't forget it, you bet," replied Joe.

He and Jimmy left together, and Pete remarked to his boss:

"He put it up as sure as you live, boss."

"I think so, too. If you find out that he did let me know, and I'll make him so sick he'll want to go to the hospital. Shut up now and be round lively early in the morning."

Pete proceeded to shut up the store, and in ten minutes was free to run around with the boys till midnight if he wanted to.

He was not long in finding Joe and Jimmy, to whom he said:

"Wasn't she mad, though?"

"You bet," said Jimmy. "It was as good as a circus. Who put up the job, Pete?"

"Joe, of course."

"Oh, come off!"

"Yes, he did; I saw him."

Joe laughed and said:

"I thought you were looking t'other way. Don't give it away, Pete."

"No. Boss is glad, as she'll have to pay for about seven dollars' worth of goods at top prices."

"Bully!" exclaimed Joe, laughing. "He ought to whack up on profits."

"Not he," replied Pete. "He don't whack up with nawthin'."

"He's a mean sort of a cuss," remarked Jimmy. "Sorry she didn't give him the salt in his face."

"Glad I dodged it," returned Pete. "She's good on the throw, she is."

"Yes. She's boss at home, I guess."

"Not much she ain't. Mike Malone is boss there. She told my boss not to let Micky know and she'd pay for the things she broke."

CHAPTER V.

THE BITER BIT—JOE CATCHES IT HEAVY.

EARLY the next morning Pete told his boss that Joe Miller had changed the box of salt for the box of wagon grease which Mrs. Malone and Mrs. Harris had bought the night before.

"How do you know he did?" Mrs. O'Halloran asked.

"He owned up, boss."

"Oh, he did, eh?"

"Yes, sir; last night."

"Well, just leave him to me. I'll make him sick of jokes. I'll show him that two can play at that game."

Pete chuckled, and looked forward to no end of fun when the boss and Joe began playing on each other.

"Don't gimme away, boss," he said.

"Don't worry, but just wait till I get up on him."

Joe did not go about the store for three or four days, when his mother sent him in to buy some sugar.

"Yes," said O'Halloran, "I've got the best in the city."

"Oh, that's too high toned for me," replied Joe. "Gimme some that ain't the best. Some that has lots of sweetness in it."

"Here it is, white as snow and sweet as sugar."

"Gimme five pounds."

The sugar was weighed out and Joe was about to leave after paying for it, when O'Halloran said:

"Here's a bottle of ginger pop for you, and an apple for your mother."

"Holy mackerell!" exclaimed Joe, looking at the bottle, the apple, and the grocer. "When did yer git religion, Mr. O'Halloran!"

The grocer laughed.

"You've been a steady customer, Joe, and all grocers do that way sometimes," and he handed the bottle and big red apple to Joe, adding:

"I've given away at least fifty bottles, and a barrel of apples to-day. Would you like to drink the ginger pop here, or take it home with you?"

"I'll drink it here," said Joe.

"All right. I have no glass, but you can drink it from the bottle, can you not?"

"Yes, right from the bung," replied Joe.

O'Halloran drew the cork and Joe soon worried the contents of the bottle into his stomach.

"There you are, now," said the grocer. "How is that for ginger pop?"

"Bully," replied Joe, as he started to leave the store.

He gave his mother the big red apple and said the grocer had sent it to her, and given him a bottle of ginger pop.

"He is a nice man," said his mother, as she took the apple. "Will you have half the apple?"

"No, ma'am, I've had my share in the ginger pop," and he went out again for a walk.

But he had not been out ten minutes ere he began to feel sick at the stomach.

He took a drink of cold water, but he grew worse every minute till he felt sick enough to die.

"Oh, lord!" he groaned. "O'Halloran has dosed me! That was a put up job. I thought it strange he should offer to treat. Ugh! oh, Lord! Ugh!"

Joe fell down on the sidewalk too sick to walk, and a crowd soon gathered around him, thinking he was having a fit or something of the kind.

Some one asked him where he lived, and he had enough strength left to tell the number, and he was taken home.

Mrs. Miller was terrified almost to death, and sent Jimmy for a physician, who came and made the discovery, when Joe had made a disengagement of everything he had eaten during the day, that he had been given a powerful emetic.

"He has eaten or drank something which disagreed with him," he said. "He'll be all right in the morning. One dollar if you please."

She gave him the money and he went away, leaving him to wrestle with the emetic as best he could.

Joe was a sick boy all night long, but was better in the morning, though looking as pale as a ghost.

He was sure that O'Halloran had dosed him, though he did not say so. The grocer had been as good as his word—he had made him sick—sick as two dogs.

But Joe registered a great big vow to catch up with him.

"Oh, I won't be left very far behind on the homestretch," he said to himself, as he thought it over. "I won't forget how sick I was. Oh, Lord! wasn't I sick! Just wait for me, Mr. O'Halloran! I'll come and see you—don't worry."

It took two whole days to make Joe feel like himself again, and then he paid a visit to the store just to see if the grocer would take any notice of him.

Pete had told his boss how sick Joe had been, and that worthy had chuckled and rubbed his hands with glee.

"I knew it would make him sick, the young rascal," he said. "Maybe he won't be so fond of playing jokes on other people. He can't get ahead of me playing jokes."

When Joe walked into the store O'Halloran cast a furtive glance at him, and Pete chuckled and pretended to be busy arranging some boxes under the counter.

"Gimme some cayenne pepper," said Joe—"five cents' worth."

"Yes," said O'Halloran, coming forward to wait on him.

The pepper was wrapped up and paid for.

"How's your mother?" the grocer asked. "I've not seen her for two or three days."

"Oh, she's all right, and I'm all O. K., too," remarked Joe.

"Of course you are. You are a healthy young dog, you are."

"Yes, you are right there," and Joe sauntered out of the store as if he had never seen a sick day in all his life.

"Oh, Mr. O'Halloran," chuckled Joe, "just wait till I call for you. You'll wish you had never been born, or my name is not Joe Miller."

Joe bought the cayenne pepper for a purpose and not for home use. He placed it in his vest pocket to be kept ready for use when wanted.

A barrel of apples stood among the vegetables, and about a half an hour after Joe left, O'Halloran went out and saw that at least half of the apples were gone.

On the barrel was a poster which read:

"VERY FINE—TAKE ONE."

Everybody who had passed and noticed the poster on the barrel took an apple as a sample—they thought.

O'Halloran howled.

He leapt up and down and said many things which could not be written and printed. Pete ran out to see what ailed him, and saw that at least a half barrel of fine Baldwins had disappeared.

The poster was torn off, and the barrel rolled inside the store.

"I'd give five dollars to know who put up that job," said O'Halloran, white with rage.

An hour later he found that his sale of eggs had stopped.

They had been going like hot cakes all the morning.

On a large crate of fresh ones he suddenly found a notice printed.

"Bad—two for a cent."

Then he howled like a lunatic, and vowed to shoot somebody.

Just then Joe came in and asked:

"Have you got any more of that good ginger pop like that I got the other night—the stuff you treated me to?"

O'Halloran glared at him in dumfounded amazement.

"Did you like it?" he asked.

"Yes," said Joe. "It was fine. Where can I get another bottle like it?"

"I don't know. I am out of it now—will have some more to-morrow or next day."

"Well, save me two bottles of it when it comes," and he walked out of the store without having purchased anything, and the grocer half suspected that he had tumbled to the racket of the ginger pop.

A few minutes after Joe left Pete called the boss outside to see what was on the pyramid of white sugar which had been placed there to attract attention.

It was a simple legend, and read:

"Half sand—half price."

O'Halloran glared at the placard in dumfounded amazement.

"Peter," he said, "I'm going to buy a gun and set a watch for the villain!"

"He ought to be killed, sir," said Pete who curried favor on every occasion.

"Hello, O'Halloran!" cried a well-known customer coming up from over the way. "I'm sorry to hear of your trouble. Didn't know you were in such a strait."

"What are you talking about?" the grocer demanded in a puzzled sort of way.

"Why the sale of your store by the sheriff. I see it's advertised to take place next Tuesday."

O'Halloran nearly fell down under the blow.

"It ain't true!" he gasped, as he looked wildly about him. "I don't owe a dollar. I can pay on demand. Who advertised that?"

"Why come out here!" and the customer led him outside and showed him a bill posted up on the front of the awning, which read:

SHERIFF'S SALE.

This store and stock of Groceries on Tuesday next at 2 P. M.

O'Halloran read the bill and was almost paralyzed. He sprang at it and tore it down, gasping:

"Some scoundrel has played a joke on one. I'll kill him for it yet."

"Well, I'm glad I spoke to you about it," said the customer. "It might have done you an injury."

"Yes, so it would. Much obliged to you," and he went inside the store, passed back to the rear, where he opened a bottle of good old brandy and took a strong pull at its contents.

CHAPTER VI.

JOE SEEKS REVENGE AND PUTS THE GROCER IN THE HOSPITAL.

JOE MILLER stood at a convenient distance unperceived by the grocer, and saw the excitement his advertisement had created at the corner store. Said he:

"Oh, no!" he chuckled, "I am not very far behind, Mr. O'Halloran. Your ginger pop racket was a good one, and laid me out cold, but if I don't get ahead of you I'll go to the cemetery on foot and bury myself. Don't worry, dear, I'm coming. I'll be dar, as the moke said to the dominie."

The last card broke O'Halloran all up. He hung on to that bottle of brandy till he was in a humor to fight any and everybody who came to the store. Then he passed on to the maudlin stage, in which he succumbed and lay down in the rear of the store on a pile of boxes to keep the sleep of the dead drunk.

When Joe came in again he found Pete in full charge, and was in high glee.

"Where's the boss, Pete?" he asked.

"Laid out cold, Josie," was the reply.

"What! the boss dead?"

"Yes—dead drunk!"

"Oh, come off!"

"Come here," and Pete led him back to where the grocer was sleeping off the drunk he had put into himself.

Joe whistled expressively.

"I didn't know he was on to that, Pete," he said.

"First time, Joe. Somebody put up a sheriff's sale notice on him this morning, and that broke him all up."

"Well, that's a good one," and Joe laughed heartily. "I wouldn't have thought it of him."

On the way back to the front of the store Joe discovered a marking-pot and brush.

Pete was called to wait on two ladies who came in at that moment. Joe seized the pot and brush, slipped back to the sleeping man and transformed his florid complexion into one of ebony hue. Then he slipped back, and had not been missed by Pete.

Customers came in in rapid succession, and Joe stood around to lend a hand when wanted.

In the meantime the blacking on the sleeper's face had dried, and taken a grip which only a copious bath of turpentine could loosen.

Watching his opportunity Joe gave him a pinch of cayenne pepper from the supply he carried in his vest pocket. A long inhalation carried it far up into his nose.

Joe hastened to leave the store, for he knew there would be music in just two minutes, or less time.

Scarcely did he get out into the street ere he heard a succession of sneezes and howls in the back room of the store, and three women came running out very much frightened.

"Ar-chew! ar-chew! Oh, Lord! ar-chew! Mur—ar-chew! Whoop—ar-chew!" and a man came running out of the store, his face black as pitch, sneezing with such vehemence that he fell down on the sidewalk in convulsions, howling like a lunatic at times.

"Gosh almighty!" gasped Pete, almost paralyzed with astonishment. "The boss has got 'em sure!"

A big crowd quickly gathered, and the police took a hand.

"What's the matter with him?" the officer asked.

"Crazy," said one.

"Lunatic," put in a second.

"Jim jama," added a third.

O'Halloran rolled over, doubled up, turned somersaults and sneezed and howled so furiously that an officer signaled for an ambulance, which soon came dashing up with a young surgeon in charge.

Of course he could not tell what ailed the grocer. The blackened face, however, induced him to believe that he was a crank who had been making some chemical experiments, and was now paying the penalty.

They placed him in the ambulance and hurried away with him, two men sitting on him to hold him down.

Joe and Jimmy fell on each other's necks when the ambulance went away and seemed to be rejoicing in a bond of mutual sympathy.

"Oh, ginger pop!" cried Joe.

"Joe, you're a brick!" said Jimmy. "Yer ought ter go ter Congress—yer ought an'—"

"Whist, Jimmy—niver a word," said Joe. "Wait till he comes home again and then we'll talk it over."

Joe danced all the way round the block where the residents were all out of their houses discussing the strange antics of the grocer.

"I say, Josie!" called a boy from across the street.

"What is it!" Joe answered.

"Did you see the call in der mornin's papers?"

"What call?"

The boy ran over and showed him a paper in which a telegraph and district messenger company had advertised for boys.

Joe read it and exclaimed:

"I'll go and catch on to that."

"So will I," said Jimmy.

"I've done caught on," said the other youth.

That stimulated them and they hastened to make an application for employment.

At the office they were promptly accepted, for they were just the size and age they wanted.

Their names, ages and residences were recorded in a book, and then their measure for uniforms taken.

"Come back to-morrow," said the superintendent, "and get in instructions. Your uniforms will be ready in two or three days."

They left the office, and out on the street they shook hands over their good luck.

"Oh, won't we have fun!" exclaimed Joe, as they walked off up the street.

"Where will it come in?" Jimmy asked.

"Why, won't we be sent running all over the town?"

"Yes, so we will. Whoop! What fun!" and Jimmy saw where the chances for fun would come in every day in the week.

Mrs. Miller was overjoyed when she heard that Joe had obtained regular employment as a messenger boy. He would be out late, but he would be employed and would be paid regularly, which would be very different from the way they had been living for several years past.

The next day the two chums were on hand early at the main office of the company to receive instructions as to their duties.

There were at least half a hundred of them, but Joe and Jimmy only knew two of the lot.

But that did not make any difference with the little joker. He was just as ready for fun as though he knew everybody in the house.

Said the superintendent in giving them instructions:

"You must not forget that this is *business*—not *play*—and that you are to be *paid* for your work—that good, faithful work means good pay and promotion to better pay and service. If you are sent on an errand you are to go promptly, quickly, and perform the service intelligently, and then hasten back to report at the office. Don't stop to look at a truckman trying to get his horse up on his feet, or to see an officer arrest a tramp, or—"

"How 'bout a dog fight?" Joe asked, at which the boys roared with laughter.

"Business first *always*," replied the superintendent. "A boy ought to be ashamed to stop in the street and look at a dog fight."

"Oh, come off!" replied Joe, and the boys roared again, whilst a smiled played round the mouth of the good-natured superintendent.

"Dog fights are prohibited by the rules of this company," said the superintendent, "and any boy in its employ who—"

"Then you've got ter muzzle the dogs," interrupted Joe, good-naturedly, and another laugh followed.

"We'll have to put a muzzle on you if you don't keep quite while I am talking," replied the speaker.

"That settles it," returned Joe, and he listened as attentively as the teacher could desire till he was through.

"Now you have heard the rules," the superintendent added, "and those of you who think you can't obey them had better say so now and retire."

Not a boy moved.

"When will the new togs be ready?" Joe asked.

"In two or three days. The price of them will be deducted from your salaries—a little off each week."

"Oh—oh—oh!" came from the boys at this announcement.

They all caught on pretty well to the instructions they had received, and were then dismissed after being told to appear the next morning for preliminary work.

Out on the street the majority of the boys gathered around Joe and shook hands with him. They liked his pluck in talking back at the boss—as they called the superintendent.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST MESSAGE AND HOW HE CARRIED IT.

Joe's mind being at rest in regard to the position of messenger he went out in the evening with Jimmy to hunt up a little fun among the boys. He wanted to hear from O'Halloran the grocer, and so they made their way down to the corner.

Pete was outside trying to sell some vegetables to a woman when Joe and Jimmy put in an appearance.

"Don't go in there, Joe," Pete whispered to him. "He'll kill you sure."

"What does he want to kill me for?" Joe asked, with an amount of innocent expression that made Pete stare for once in his life.

Just then O'Halloran came out with a lady customer to sell her some potatoes which were in a barrel in front of the store, and he caught sight of the little Joker.

With a fierce growl he darted at him to clutch his throat, but Joe was too nimble for him and got beyond his reach.

"What's the matter with you, Mr. O'Halloran?" Joe asked. "Off your base?"

"I'll yank you off your base if I ever get my hands on you, you young imp of cussedness!" hissed the irate grocer, shaking his fist fiercely at him as he spoke.

"But what's the matter with you?" Joe asked again, with an innocence of expression that but added to his fury.

"Matter enough, you imp," replied the grocer. "Keep off this corner if you want to live long. I'm just waiting to get my hands on you."

"Oh, come off now and tell me what kink you have on now. What's the matter with you, anyhow? Why don't they lock you up till they know whether it's jimjams or—"

O'Halloran made a dash for him again, and Joe took to his heels. He knew he could never catch him, and so did not have any fears on that score.

Enraged beyond endurance, O'Halloran chased him a whole block, and then a score of boys joined in and hooted at the burly grocer till he was glad enough to give it up and go back to his corner.

"I say, Mr. O'Halloran!" Joe called aloud. "Did you save me two more bottles of ginger pop like the one you gave me the other day?"

"I'll be the death of you!" hissed the grocer, shaking his fist at the little Joker.

Joe laughed, and a few minutes later he and Jimmy went by the grocery as unconcerned as any others that came along.

At sight of them O'Halloran lost control of himself again, and seizing a large potato hurled it at him with all his might.

Of course he missed him, for Joe was a nimble dodger, and the 'murphy' landed on the chest of Mike Flynn, a stalwart policeman, who turned the corner just in time to receive it.

"Whoop!" yelled Mike, who had not clubbed any one during the whole day. "Hit me wid a pratie, will ye? Whoop!" and he went for O'Halloran with his club upraised.

"Hold on till ye, Mike!" called O'Halloran, trying to save himself.

But Mike was too mad to be reasoned with. That pound weight of

"pratie" had staggered him, and now he'd stagger the thrower if his locust held out.

It did hold out and O'Halloran went down like a log under it.

Then he was arrested and dragged to the police station where he was unceremoniously locked up for the night.

"How is that for a joke, Jimmy?" Joe asked as he saw the grocer being led away by the cop.

"It's bad on him," returned Jimmy.

"Yes, and I'm just a little bit sorry he got such a big dose."

"But he made yer mighty sick wid the ginger pop, Joe."

"So he did, cully, but I'm ahead, I guess."

Fearing that O'Halloran might give him away and have an officer sent for him Joe decided to sleep with Jimmy that night so that the officers could not find him if they called for him.

But they did not call, and when Joe went home to breakfast he found that his mother had not even heard of the scrape the grocer on the corner had gotten into.

On hearing O'Halloran's explanation the judge discharged him with a nominal fine and cautioned him about throwing potatoes in a reckless way.

The grocer returned to his store a wiser and better man—maybe a madder one—but firmly resolved to have no more to do with the little Joker.

In the meantime Joe and Jimmy went to work as messenger boys, and when they put on their new uniforms they felt as proud as young roosters just beginning to crow.

"I say, Jimmy," said Joe, as he strutted about the waiting-room whilst waiting for a call. "We ain't in luck, are we?"

"Naw," drawled Jimmy. "This ain't no luck. Just look at my togs."

"Yes, I see 'em, but don't feel proud, cully."

"Naw, I ain't a bit proud."

The boys were all numbered, and Joe was number 30.

When they were called their numbers alone were called.

"Number 30!" sung out the manager.

Joe hastened to respond.

"Do you know where Worth street is?" the manager asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Go to number — Worth street. A messenger is called for. See what is the best time you can make."

Joe darted out on the street and made a race up toward Worth that, without his uniform, would have caused a sensation.

A messenger boy running through the streets does not attract much attention, because everybody knows that he is a message carrier and that he is expected to go fast.

But Joe could no more do his errand without having a little fun out of it than he could fly.

Running at full speed, he struck against a young dude who was dressed to kill, and sent him rolling in the gutter.

The dude swore in drawling accents, and vowed that he would go to the headquarters and "repowt the wude fellah."

Up in the next block he ran into an apple woman's stand and upset it.

"Howly mither av Moses!" exclaimed the old woman, seizing a stick and going for him. "It's ivery bone in yez body I'll be after breaking."

To escape the irate old woman's wrath he made a dashing excursion into the crowd that was surging along Broadway. The next moment a man weighing nearly 300 pounds threw up both hands, uttered a yell, and went down in a heap on the ground.

Joe narrowly escaped being crashed under him, but he did not stop to apologize or ascertain the amount of damage done.

"Stop 'im—stop 'im!" cried the fat man, who did not intend to be upset that way without meting out some kind of punishment for it.

But nobody could stop him.

He went ahead at the top of his speed, and in another minute or two a long, lanky, dyspeptic was upset and sent sprawling in the dust.

"Help! Murder!" roared this last man, scrambling to his feet and striking wildly around him with his umbrella. "Thieves! Murder! Help!"

And in his wild excitement he knocked off at least half a dozen hats.

"What's the matter with you?" exclaimed a man whose hat had been sent rolling in the gutter.

"Help! Murder!" yelled the man, striking wildly at every man who came within striking distance of him.

"He's crazy!" cried one.

"Call an officer," suggested another.

"Knock him down!" added a third.

And a crowd began to gather around to see what the excitement was about.

Just then an officer came up and asked:

"What's the trouble here?"

"Some burglar knocked me down and tried to rob me!" cried the countryman. "Stand off! Yer can't rob me. I've heered tell of yer tricks on strangers."

"Nobody is trying to rob you," said the officer. "Move on now, and keep your umbrella to yourself, or I'll run you in and lock you up."

That silenced hayseed, and he moved along down the street with the crowd.

But a crowd of boys had spotted him as a green countryman, and so they went along to add to his misery as much as they could.

Joe reached the place where he was called, and received a note from a gentleman to deliver to a lady up-town on West Fifty-sixth street.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, when he saw the address on the envelope.

"That's a long run, mister."

"Jump on the street cars, you fool!"

"Street cars! I can beat 'em ter death on foot."

"What! a messenger boy go faster than a street car," exclaimed the man. "What are you giving me?"

"I'm giving yer fast time, mister," he replied.

"See here, now," said the man, looking at his watch, "I'll give you five dollars if you can beat the street car time from here to Fifty-sixth street. Bring me a note from the lady ten minutes ahead of street car time and I'll give you the money."

"Nuff sed," cried Joe, darting out of the store and running down toward Center street. "I'll collar that boodle, see if I don't."

Two blocks away he saw a butcher cart driven by a youth whom he had known for two or three years.

He hailed the driver with:

"Hello, Mike!"

"Hello, Joe!"

"Gimme a lift!" Joe cried.

Mike reined up his horse, and Joe scrambled up on the seat beside him.

"Mike, run me up to Fifty-sixth street and I'll give you a half dollar."

What butcher's boy could resist such an offer?

"Gimme the chink," replied Mike.

Joe had sixty cents in his pocket, and in less than sixty seconds he had transferred fifty cents of it to Mike.

Then the bob-tailed horse went flying up the street at a tremendous pace.

Several policemen shook their clubs at the couple, but they paid no heed to them.

Joe reached the destination of the note before the street cars had made half the distance, telling Mike to wait at the corner below for him.

He rang the door bell.

A tidy servant came to the door.

"Tell her she has two minutes ter write an answer," he said to the girl, as he gave her the note.

The girl hastened up-stairs and left him standing at the door.

Just three minutes later she returned, with a little note addressed to the sender of the first note, which she gave to him.

Joe bounded down the stoop and dashed away at the top of his speed.

Mike was waiting for him, and in another minute he was careering down-town at a break-neck speed again.

When within half a dozen blocks of Worth street Joe left the butcher's cart and ran the rest of the way on foot.

Dashing into the store, he gave the gentleman the note, saying:

"Pony out that fiver, mister."

"Great Scott!" gasped the man, in dumfounded amazement, "you haven't been there?"

"Read the note."

He read the note.

"Yes, all right—here's your money. You're the fastest messenger I ever saw," and he handed him the money.

CHAPTER VIII.

A JOKE THE GROCER LIKED.

JOE hastened to the office to report, and the manager was astounded when he saw the book.

"You haven't been up to Fifty-sixth street, have you?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. The man said he was in a hurry, and so I went in a hurry."

"I guess you did. There have been three men in here to complain of having been knocked down and run over by you," and the manager seemed to regard him with a sort of inward admiration. "But I can't see for the life of me how a boy of your size can knock down and run over a man weighing three hundred pounds. How did you do it, anyhow?"

"I don't know, sir. He run inter me, an' I had ter be lively ter keep from being mashed ter death by the old mountain of fat."

The manager laughed and said:

"Well, we like to have you boys make good time, but you must not run over and trample on people."

"But if they get in our way?" Joe asked.

"Go round them."

Joe whistled in a manner expressive of astonishment.

"What's the matter?" the manager asked.

"That big man measured a mile around. Can't afford to go round him on the pay we get," and he shook his head in such an emphatic manner that the manager roared with laughter.

"If you take the chances of being killed go ahead," he said, after a pause of some minutes.

By and by Joe sat down by No. 16, a fat boy whose motions were slow and deliberate, and was telling him what a long run he made up to Fifty-sixth street, when 16 was called for a run.

As he stepped forward to get instructions the others screamed with laughter, as they read chalked on his back:

"Greased lightning."

He was the slowest boy in the service.

"What's the matter?" the manager asked, looking around at the boys. No. 16 turned to look at them, too, thus exposing his back to the manager, who saw the chalk mark and roared, too.

"None of that now, boys," he said. "Business is business—play after office hours. The one who chalked his back will please step forward and brush it off, and never repeat it."

But Joe did not step forward to brush it off. He knew that no one had seen him do the job, and was not going to give himself away.

The manager began to grow red in the face when he saw all the boys laughing instead of any one stepping forward to obey him.

"Who did that?" he demanded, in a loud tone of voice.

"The cat," replied a small boy in the corner

"Who said that?"

"The dog," came from the other end of the room, at which there was a roar.

He saw that he was in the minority, and so retired to his desk and called:

"Number 17!"

He was red-haired, freckle-faced and cross-eyed.

On his back was scrawled with chalk:

"The dude."

The boys screamed, and the manager said to him.

"Turn round and let's see what inscription you have on your back."

The boy turned round, and when the manager saw the sarcasm of the thing he could not repress a smile.

But he was angry, and exclaimed:

"The next time that is done the guilty one shall be fined one day's pay, and the fine given to the one whose coat is chalked."

"Whoop!" cried Joe. "Won't somebody please mark my coat?"

"What's that?"

"Somebody will please mark my coat," said Joe.

"The company will keep the fine," corrected the manager.

"Ah-h-h!" came from all the boys.

"Number 18!"

The boy stepped forward.

He was tall, thin and lanky, and on his back was chalked:

"Shanks!"

The manager grew furious.

The boys were making game of him, and that made him madder still.

"I'll fine the whole crowd if I see any more of that!" he yelled, angrily.

"Bully!" cried Joe.

"Numbers 19 and 20!" called the manager, as signals came in for messengers to go in different directions.

Neither of them bore any chalk marks on their backs, and the manager flattered himself that he had put a check on the joker whoever he was.

But he had reckoned without the Joker, and in an hour or so he found that his very pompous threat had no more effect on the unknown wag than so much wind.

In front of his desk was a smooth panel, on which were the words:

"Big Boss" were chalked at a time when not a soul was looking on.

The chuckling of the boys attracted his attention, and he made an investigation, only to find those sarcastic words staring him in the face.

"Here, you young scoundrels!" he angrily exclaimed, "I'll fine every one of you one day's pay unless you tell me who did that."

"'Twas the cat!"

"The dog!"

"A rat!"

"None o' your tricks now, boss!" and a score of other yells came at him.

"No pay no work, boss," said Joe when the noise had subsided.

"You've no right to fine me for what some other boy did."

The manager knew that as well as he did, and so he had to recede from that position.

"I'll give five dollars for the name of the guilty one," he said.

But they were not the boys to give each other away in that style, and so he got a deep silence from them in reply to his offer.

In due time No. 30 was called again, and to his amazement, a man wanted him to go to O'Halloran, the grocer, and pay a bill he owed there.

It was a debt of twenty-two dollars, which had been owing for two years. The debtor had just made a hit in speculation, and was honest enough to pay up.

"Bring back a receipt with you," said the man as Joe started out.

"Yes, sir," and he darted away to do the commission without delay.

As he entered the store O'Halloran glared at him and reached for a bung-starter.

"What do you want here?" the grocer asked, as if half reluctant to give him even that much breathing spell.

"I want to give you another little joke," was the cool reply.

"Great Scott!"

O'Halloran gave a howl and bounced over the counter like a rocket, club in hand.

"Hold up, yer crazy loon," cried Joe, retreating toward the door.

"I want to pay you some money!"

"Eh! what?"

"I want to pay you some money," and he drew the roll of bills which had been given him by the broker, from his pocket.

"You don't owe me any money!" exclaimed O'Halloran, who feared the joker was playing him for a fool again. Get out before I kill ye!"

Joe retreated out on the sidewalk and said:

"Mr. Jackson sent me here to pay you \$22 he owes you. If you don't want it I'll take it back to him."

"Jackson's bill!" gasped the dumfounded grocer, who had long been willing to take twenty-two cents for the debt. "Holy smoke. Joe Miller! Come in here and let me see that money," and the club jumped out of his hand and an expectant smile spread over the face of the grocer.

"Oh, you don't want the money," returned Joe. "I'll take it back

and tell him you drove me away with a club for daring to mention his name to you."

"Did he send the money to pay that bill?"

"Yes—here it is—four fives and one two dollar bill," and Joe showed him the money.

"Joe Miller—we are friends again! There's my hand, I ain't got nothing against ye!" and he held out his hand and Joe took it and handed him the money Jackson had sent.

O'Halloran counted it, found it correct, and said:

"Twenty-two dollars. I never expected to get it! What luck! What luck!"

"Good joke, eh?" said Joe.

"Yes. I'd like you play it on me that way every day in the week."

"Oh, come off! You'd want to kill me with a big club or a barrel of ginger pop."

At the mention of ginger pop O'Halloran smiled.

"It's all over now," he said, "and we are friends again, but own up to it that the ginger pop got away with you."

"Of course it did, but it didn't make me sneeze myself into a police station. Oh no—not much," and Joe looked at him out of a corner of his eye and chuckled.

O'Halloran frowned, said nothing, wrote a receipt for the money, and Joe left the store with it to return to the man who had sent him there.

CHAPTER IX.

JOE AND THE OLD CRANK.

"WHAT did he say?" Jackson asked when Joe gave him the grocer's receipt for the \$22.

"It nearly paralyzed him," replied Joe, "and he reached for a club, thinking I was making game of him."

The man laughed and remarked:

"No wonder. He never expected to get a cent, and I had little hope a week ago of ever being able to pay it. There are several more fellows I want to paralyze that way. Here, take this money and pay that man's bill against me. He is a Frenchman, a tailor," and he gave him \$20 and a piece of paper, on which he had written the confiding tailor's address.

"I can't speak French," Joe said as he took the money.

"Never mind. The money can talk French plain enough for him to understand."

Joe took the money and went on the errand with all the speed he could command.

On the way up the street he saw No. 16 standing on the sidewalk in front of a tawny-store window gazing at the display of goods.

Out came his chalk, and in another moment the word

"TIME!" was marked on the back of the loitering messenger.

Joe had not gone a block ere he heard the street urchins calling "Time" on the unlucky messenger, who did not understand why they did so.

At the French tailor's place Joe asked the erstwhile frog-eater:

"Does Mr. Jackson owe you twenty dollars for a suit of clothes?"

"Vot eeze zat?" the tailor asked in surprise, dropping his heavy shears and gazing at the messenger.

"Does Mr. Jackson owe you twenty dollars?" Joe repeated.

"By gar! Monsieur Shackson is von tieff!"

"He sent me here to pay his bill," said Joe, producing the money.

The Frenchman's wife, a buxom, motherly-looking woman, who could speak English much better than her husband, came rushing from the rear of the shop and exclaimed:

"Monsieur Shackson pay hees bill, Pierre!"

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur Shackson is von gentleman—gentle hommie," exclaimed the tailor, dropping his work and prancing around the room like a monkey.

"Mr. Jackson says won't you please lend him money enough to pay his bill," said Joe, without changing countenance for a moment.

"Sacre!"

"Diable!"

The tailor seized a heavy smoothing-iron and flourished it above his head as if to demonstrate what he would do to Monsieur Shackson if he had him there.

He spluttered French all around Joe, and was on the point of kicking him out of the shop, when the tailor's pretty sixteen-year-old

daughter came in. She understood English like a native, for she had been born in New York.

She saw her father and mother in a rage, and asked:

"What's the matter?"

"I came here to pay Mr. Jackson's bill of twenty dollars, but can't make 'em understand me," and he gave her the money.

They all understood him, but did not realize that he had simply had a little joke at their expense.

Then the tailor threw his arms around his wife's neck, then embraced his daughter, after which he gave Joe a hug that made him think a boa constrictor had suddenly caught him in its folds.

"Monsieur has his little joke," said the daughter, smiling as she received a little explanation from her mother.

The daughter wrote out the receipt for her father, which he duly signed, and gave it to Joe, who said to her:

"They don't understand as well as you do."

"No, sir. They came from *La Belle France*. I was born in New York."

"Tell your father that it is against the law for French tailors to sell tailor-made clothes on credit. If he has any money owing him for clothes he had better collect it at once to save trouble," and with that he darted out of the store, leaving the French family in an exceedingly pleasant frame of mind.

"He'll worry the dudes who owe him for work," chuckled Joe, as he wended his way back down to the office.

He had not been in ten minutes ere No. 16 came in with half a hundred boys outside, who had acted as an escort for him, calling "time" at every step.

When the trick was discovered the manager was furious. But he could do nothing. He told No. 16 that if he did not make better time and keep chalk-marks off his back he would discharge him.

"That settles it," said Joe to himself. "I won't have 'im fired out. That would be no fun at all."

He threw away his piece of chalk and looked around for some other way of amusing himself.

Time was hanging heavy on his hands, when one day, after he had been a fortnight in the service of the company, he was sent up-town to a fashionable part of the city to answer a call for a messenger.

He found that he had been sent for by a wealthy crank, who was laid up with an attack of gout and blues.

"How old are you?" the man asked, as Joe was shown into his room by the tidy maid-servant.

"I'm 180 months and two weeks and four days old, sir," was the reply.

The man looked at him a minute or two and then nodded his head, muttering:

"Yes, yes, maybe he'll do after all," and then he added after a little pause:

"I want you to make me laugh, youngster. I want to laugh. I haven't laughed in two years. Can you make me laugh?"

Joe tumbled at once to the fact that he had been sent to humor a crank.

"I dunno, sir. I'm a solamecolly cuss myself. Have yer tried the funny men in the theaters and nigger minstrels?"

"Yes, tried 'em all—disgusted—sick. Nothing but old chestnuts."

"It won't hurt yer to laugh, will it?"

"No, it would make me happy. It'll make your fortune if you can make me laugh."

"Well, why don't you laugh if yer want to? There ain't no law against it that I know of."

"That's easier said than done, young man," replied the crank. "I've done my best, and can't do it."

"Did you ever try a smile?"

"Oh, yes, but it won't come," and he shook his head in a hopeless sort of way.

"Well, I ain't much of a doctor for you, but I know what cured a man over in Jersey who had 'em just like you."

"Had what? What was the matter with him?"

"The jim jams."

"Jim jams! Why, I am a temperance man!"

"Temperance man! Oh, come off now! Temperance men all laugh. You can't give me such glue as that. I won't have it."

"Why what have temperance men got to laugh at?"

"The fools who guzzle."

"Is that funny?"

"Well, yes—to some people."

"But not to me. I can't laugh at such stuff as that."

"Why don't yer laugh at yerself then?"

"Laugh at myself! Why should I? I am not comical."

"Yer ain't! I'll tell Barnum. Yer're the funniest bloke I ever saw in all my life. The idea of a big man like you sitting up here as solemn as an owl moaning because he can't laugh, oh, crickey! Just lemme howl!" and Joe burst into a roar of merriment that rang through the house. He laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and rolled over on the carpets, holding his sides.

The crank looked on in silence for a minute or two, and then a smile began to come about his mouth, which finally broadened into a grin, to end in a chuckle. Then came a guffaw, and a moment or two later he was leaping about the room almost in convulsions, laughing hysterically.

"Bully for me!" exclaimed Joe when he saw that he had started him. "I thought I'd fetch him! What a crazy old loon he is!"

The crank laughed, howled, whooped, danced and rolled in ecstasies on the carpet of the handsomely furnished room, whilst Joe sat down to look on at the performance.

The door opened and the maid who had admitted him to the house, looked in, her face the picture of astonishment.

"His nibs is having a circus," Joe remarked to her.

"Oh, dear!" she exclaimed. "He hasn't laughed in years! What did you do to him?"

"I made him laugh—that's all," he replied.

The crank rolled over and over on the carpet and let out more loud, boisterous laughter than ever was heard in a lunatic asylum.

The girl, alarmed, hastened to send the hired man for the doctor, and in ten minutes or so the physician came in.

"How did you do it?" the man of medicine laughed as he asked.

"By laughing at him for being such a fool," was the reply. "What's the matter with him, anyhow?"

"It's a mental craze with him, I think," was the reply.

"Well, if there are many more like him I'll set up for a laughing quack an' scoop the shekels."

Then the doctor laughed and for a minute or two it was doubtful which of the two was the worst. Even the girl was smiling and showing all her pretty teeth.

"You are the only level head in the house," remarked Joe, after a pause.

She blushed and retreated, leaving the doctor and the messenger boy with the cranky head of the house.

The doctor finally gave him an opiate, and in a little while he simpered down and stopped laughing. But it did not put him to sleep. It simply stopped his risibles from excessive action.

"Doctor, I have laughed," was the first thing the man said.

"Yes, and laughed too much," replied the doctor.

"I don't know whether I did or not. Better laugh too much than not laugh at all. I have laughed—I have laughed."

"Well, what did you laugh at?" the doctor asked.

"At myself. I am a fool," and he chuckled again as he looked at himself in the big mirror on the opposite wall. "Here, boy—give me your number. I may send for your again."

"Number 30, sir," replied Joe. "But how about the pay?"

"Oh—here—pay the company out of that and keep the change," and he thrust a ten-dollar bill in Joe's hand.

Joe hastened away and a half hour later was at the office making his report.

CHAPTER X.

GIVE AND TAKE.

WHEN he stepped up to the desk to make his report the manager looked at Joe and smiled. Joe smiled back but said nothing.

The manager seemed to be waiting for Joe to say something, and Joe kept dumb as a clam.

Finally the manager asked, as he took the money from the book and made a note of it in his ledger:

"How is he to-day?"

"Who?" Joe asked.

"The old crank who can't laugh."

"Oh, he can laugh better than you or me," replied Joe.

"Did you make him laugh?"

"You bet. They had to send for a doctor to make him shut up."

The manager roared with laughter and Joe went back to his seat among the boys who were waiting to be called.

"How did you make his nibs laugh?" No. 17 asked, astonished at the hearty laughter of the manager.

"Oh, I told him he was a dude," was the reply. "I'm solid with him now. Give 'im taffy that way whenever you can, an' you'll get a pull on him."

Half an hour later 17 called the manager a dude to his face and was kicked for his impudence.

"You didn't do it right," whispered Joe. "Haven't you got any sense? Why didn't you smile and say he was the best-looking dude in the town? You called him a dude as you would call a man a dog. You ought to be kicked for a fool."

Number 17 rubbed the spot where he had been kicked and resolved to make himself solid the next chance he got to have a word or two with the manager.

Later in the day, when there was a lull in business, 17 walked up to the manager's desk and said:

"Mr. Dodd, I didn't mean ter hurt yer feelings when I called yer a dude."

"That's all right, my lad, only you don't want to sling any impudence at me. I won't have it."

"I meant ter say that of all the dudes I ever saw you lay over the pile, and——"

He never finished the sentence.

The manager sprang up, seized him by the shoulder, whirled him around and planted his right foot under his coat-tail with such force as to send him flying across the room into a crowd of boys who were listening to a story Jimmy O'Brien was telling.

"Just try that on again, will you?" the irate manager exclaimed.

"What's the matter, seventeen?" Joe asked, looking as sympathetic as possible. "What's he raising yer that way for, eh?"

Seventeen was dazed by the suddenness of the volcano he had uncovered, and stood rubbing his injured parts like one in a dream.

Somehow, he now tumbled to the job Joe had put up on him, and his reply to his question was a blow.

"Take *that*, yer sucker!" he angrily exclaimed, and Joe caught it on his cheek.

Quick as a flash Joe downed him and was wiping up the floor with him when Dodd, the manager, hastened to interfere.

"Behave yourself, Miller, or I'll discharge you at once."

"All right, sir. I didn't kick him like you did."

The manager went back to his desk and the boys quieted down, neither one saying a word as to the cause of the trouble.

But 17 was mad enough to kill the joker, and during the afternoon he told Joe that he'd fix him if it took him a whole year to do it.

"Oh, come off now, cully," said Joe. "Can't you take a joke?"

"No, not when it makes me out such a fool as that."

"Well, you can't help being a fool, can you?"

Seventeen winced.

The query was a hard one and ended the conversation, for a moment later 17 was called and sent out on a call, and Joe was left to look elsewhere for his fun.

By and by he received a call and went out on a short errand, which he quickly performed and returned.

On the way back to the office he passed a spot where a new building was growing slowly up from the ground. Near the sidewalk stood a barrel of unslacked lime, in which were a number of lumps as hard as stone.

He took a lump the size of a hen's egg, put it in his pocket and hastened on.

At the office he went into the wash-room and dipped the lump into a pan of water and then walked back into the waiting-room, where at least a dozen boys were seated, waiting for turns.

"Twenty-two, keep this piece of chalk for me till I come back?" he asked, handing the lump of lime to the boy who bore that number. "I am going out pretty soon and don't want to take it with me. Keep it in your pocket and don't let his nibs know anything about it."

Twenty-two took the lump and hastily thrust it into his trousers pocket, whilst Joe went out for awhile as if on business.

When he had been gone about a half hour he came back in and took a seat at the end of the row of boys and watched twenty-two.

That youth suddenly sprang up and thrust his hand into his pocket and as quickly withdrew it.

The slacking lime had burned his fingers and was entirely too hot to carry around in a trousers pocket.

But he was a boy quick to act in an emergency. In just a half minute he was outside his trousers dancing around in his shirt-tail and jacket, whilst the other boys rolled on the floor in convulsive laughter.

He took up the smoking trousers and turned the pocket inside out, spilling the slacking lime on the floor—a dead give away.

The manager tried to quiet them down but they yelled in spite of him, and he gave it up as a bad job.

"What's the matter, twenty-two?" Joe asked, suppressing a laugh as best he could.

"I owe you one, Joe," was the reply. "I didn't know your chalk was lime. Just wait for me and I'll come to see you."

"Good! Glad to see yer any time," and Joe shook hands with him in an extremely friendly way.

The boys laughed till they cried when they learned what the joke was, and 22 had to stand no end of chaffing from them.

Joe offered to bet that 22 could get out of his trousers quicker than any boy in New York, but no one took the bet.

"I'll bet you a dollar that I'll make you sick yet," said 22, shaking his head.

"I'll take that bet," said Joe, producing a dollar.

But 22 didn't have a dollar, and so the bet was not made.

Joe finally came over and took a seat by his side, but sprung up again with the agility of a squirrel.

"Whoop!" yelled 22, leaping up and dancing around, "I am even! He got a half inch of crooked pin!"

The boys yelled as Joe reached around and extracted the pin from its painful location.

Joe was red in the face.

The pin hurt awfully, but he did not get mad. He did not blame 22, though the joke was more painful than funny.

He got the pin in his hand and said:

"That was well done, 22. Shake! We are even on jokes," and he extended his hand to the pin joker, who grasped heartily in the moment of triumph.

"Ugh—ouch!" he yelled as Joe squeezed his hand, and made a frantic effort to get away.

Joe had concealed the crooked pin in his hand, and gave him the full benefit right in the palm.

"How's that?" he asked as he let him go. "Gimme some more jokes—I like 'em."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Joe had given tit for tat, and the laugh went round among the boys, who seemed to have all the fun they wanted when Joe was around.

Suddenly 30 was called again and Joe promptly responded.

"Go to No. 70 — street," was all the instruction received, and away he darted at top of his speed.

The call was from a man who had come into the place and asked permission to call a messenger. He was seated at a table with a glass of beer before him.

"Who called, sir?" Joe asked of the keeper of the place.

"That man over there," was the reply.

Joe went up to him and said:

"You called, sir. What can I do?"

"Oh, yes," replied the man, suddenly looking around at him. "Go to No. — in Nassau street, room 21, and tell John Grady that Jim Hicks says he is a scoundrel. Can you recollect that?"

"Oh, yes, sir, but why not write it out, sir, and let me take it to——"

"No, he is a shyster lawyer and would sue me. Just tell him what I told you."

"Thirty-five cents in advance, please," said Joe, making sure of his pay.

The man gave him a dollar and told him to keep the change.

Joe hastened away to do the man's bidding.

He found John Grady in his office—a big, burly fellow.

"Be you John Grady?" he asked.

"Yes," was the gruff reply. "What do you want?"

"Jim Hicks sent me here to say that you are a scoundrel."

"He did, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, why didn't he come himself and tell me that?"

"Because he's afraid, I guess."

"Exactly, and now I want you to go back, spit in his face, and tell him that I did it."

"But he'll knock me down."

"No danger of that. He is too much of a coward to hurt a flea."

Joe demanded thirty-five cents, got it, and when he reached the place he found Hicks pretty full of beer.

"What did he say?" Hicks eagerly asked, the moment he came in.

"Do you want me to tell you?"

"Yes, of course. That's what we pay you for."

"Well, he told me to do that (spat), and say he did it. That's all."

Joe spat in his face, and the man rose up with a howl to throw the table on him.

Of course he got out of the way, but the man raised a row that came near wrecking the saloon. He howled like a lunatic, and swore he would kill all the messenger boys in the city.

"Oh, come off!" said Joe. "Why don't you go and tackle him? He'd run like a turkey. He was nearly frightened to death when I gave him your message. Take a club and go up there, and he'll take to his heels like a good fellow."

"Eh! Will he?"

"Of course he would. He is a big fellow, but an awful coward. He couldn't fight a cat."

The bully, though an arrant coward, had beer enough in him to fall into the trap which Joe had laid for him.

"Come on," said Joe, "I'll see you through," and he led the way over to Nassau street.

On the way Hicks took two more drinks by way of fortifying himself for the meeting.

At the number Joe led the way up-stairs and Hicks followed.

The two men met on the first landing, and Grady, being a man of courage and savage temper, went for him like an enraged tiger.

Whack!

Whack!

"Blast you!"

"Hang you!"

"I'll kill you!"

"I'll mash your head!"

Joe ran down the stairs to give them all the elbow-room they wanted, and in another moment they came tumbling after, rolling out on the pavement, fighting like two cats.

Joe hastened across the street, and stood there till he saw a policeman arrest them, then he thought it was time to go to the office and make a report.

Not till the facts came out in the police court the next day did the manager or the public get the secret of the fight. But when the papers got hold of it they gave Joe the name of being the best practical joker for his age in the city.

He went by the name of the little joker ever after that, and all the boys were on the lookout for him to keep from being made the victims of his propensity for joking.

One day the man who could not laugh sent for him again, and Joe was eager to go, hoping to be able to catch on to another ten-dollar bill.

He found the crank just as he did on his first visit, and looking a little paler.

"How are you, my young friend?" the crank said, as he came in.

"Oh, I am all right," replied Joe. "How are you, sir?"

"Very blue—very blue to-day. I want a good hearty laugh once more."

"You don't want one like that you had last month, do you?"

"Yes, a good one."

"Why, they had to send for the doctor to make you shut up. Too much laughter isn't good for any man."

"I can't laugh too much."

"Well, what do you want to pay for a good laugh?" asked Joe, with an eye to business.

"Oh, anything. Here's five hundred dollars which I will give for a good laugh," and he laid a roll of bills on the table in front of Joe as he spoke.

"Five hundred dollars for a laugh!" gasped Joe, his eyes opening like saucers. "Why, I'd laugh a year for that!"

"I'd give ten times as much to laugh a month," said the crank.

Joe said it was funny and began to laugh—the funniest thing he ever heard—and in a few moments was rolling on the carpet in convulsions.

But the crank looked at him with the solemn visage of an owl, with no more of a smile on him than a corpse.

Joe looked up at him and asked: "Why in thunder don't you laugh?"

"I can't."

"What's the matter with you?"

"I don't know."

Joe laughed again till he had nearly bursted his throat, and all in vain.

Then he tried his jokes—old and new ones, and told all the funny stories he had ever heard, but all without effect.

"Great Scott!" thought Joe as he glanced at the \$500 on the table.

"Can't I win that prize? The joke will be on me if I can't win it."

Then he began to make a perfect fool of himself, doing everything in his power to make the crank laugh. Suddenly the crank cried out:

"You make me tired. You had better go away."

"That puts the beer on me, then," replied Joe. "When you send for me again please be in the notion to laugh and then maybe I'll stir you up. Confound it, why don't you swallow an yeast cake and ferment?"

"Ferment!"

"Yes—do something—take soda and tartaric acid separately and effervesce. That would freshen you up and make you lively. You are too stale. Some old stale beer tramp will come along some day and swallow you for a growler."

That caused an explosion.

The crank burst into a loud guffaw and began to laugh. Joe joined in with him to keep it up. He laughed heartily for a few minutes, during which time the young messenger boy crammed the money on the table into his pocket.

He had won it and the crank made no objections to his taking it.

"I'll go now, sir," he said.

"Yes, go. I'll send you word when I want you again."

Joe left the house, but on the stoop he was collared by a stalwart man and carried back into the house.

"Here, you can't rob the old lunatic that way," said the man.

"Give up that money or I'll hand you over to the law."

"Who are you?" Joe asked.

"I am his keeper—fork over that money, I say."

Joe gave up the money without another word, and the man gave him one dollar, saying:

"Now don't come here any more."

Joe left madder than a hornet.

All his hard work and high expectations had panned out just one dollar.

"Oh, for a mule ter kick me!" he exclaimed. "I had the money in my hands. It was mine, but it's gone. If the boys get hold of it I'll never hear the last of it."

When he reported to the manager, he said:

"The keeper of the old crank says we must not answer any more calls from him."

"Mad is he?"

"Yes, sir—mad as a hornet," and Joe went back to his seat among the boys to await the calling of his number again.

He was never sent up there again and he was glad of it.

Weeks and months went by and Joe still played his pranks on the boys, till he was known among them by no other name but the little joker.

One day he was sent to answer a call up on Madison avenue.

When he reached the house he was surprised to find that the old gentleman whose life he had saved once on the street, when he was on the point of being run over by a truck, was the one who had called for a messenger.

The recognition was mutual.

The old gentleman grasped his hand, saying:

"I am glad to see you, my lad. So you are a messenger boy, eh?"

"Yes, sir, and have been for several months—almost a year now?"

"Ah! why did you not come and see me? You know I owe you a debt of gratitude."

"Well, I am not the boy to do a right thing and then run after a man to make him give me something. No, sir. That ain't my style."

"Well, I'm glad to hear that. Take this letter to its address and deliver it to the man. If he is not there bring the letter back. If he is bring back an answer."

Joe took the letter and executed the errand to the old gentleman's satisfaction, after which the latter said to him:

"My lad, come up and see me next Tuesday night. I want to talk with you on business. Can you come?"

"Yes, sir, if I am able to."

Joe then left and returned to the office.

On the following Tuesday night Joe called on the old gentleman, who introduced him to his nephew, one of the rising young business men of the city.

The merchant had quite a chat with him, ending by offering him a place in his store at good pay. Joe accepted the offer, and at the end of the week resigned his place as messenger boy.

He entered the store and worked with energy and faithfulness, that in a couple of years he was promoted to one of the most responsible positions in the firm. He is a rich man now, and the father of an interesting family. But he is a joker still and always ready to have his fun with his friends.

[THE END.]

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